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EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL STUDIES ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST

XVII. HEALING OF THE GADARENE DEMONIAC

MARK 5:11-20¹

I. EXPOSITION

Jesus had crossed to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee for reasons not stated. He may have gone for rest or to reach a new community. The Gerasenes were pagan and superstitious. On landing, Jesus was met by a demoniac, exceedingly fierce, whose dwelling was in the tombs, natural or artificial excavations in the rocks, which frequently became resorts for wild men and beasts. Because of his attacks upon passers-by, efforts had frequently been made to bind him with chains, but to no avail. When he met Jesus, he seemed to recognize the sovereignty and authority of his person, and showed a spirit of submissiveness, coupled with reluctance to yield to his control. There was a strong mingling of reverence and opposition. Jesus healed him. The account states that the healing involved the casting out of many demons whose dwelling-place had been in the man, together with Jesus' permission that they might enter into a herd of swine which was feeding on a neighboring slope near the sea. The swine, excited by the presence of the demons, rushed madly down into the sea and were drowned. The owners, whom report brought quickly to the scene, beheld the demoniac healed and clothed at Jesus' feet, but their chief concern was for the loss of their property. Moved both by resentment and by fear, they besought Jesus to quit their country. On going, he refused the request of the healed man to accompany him, but commanded him to carry the news of his restoration to his friends.

Most readers find unusual perplexity in this account. The fact that Mark mentions only one demoniac, while Matthew mentions two, presents no difficulty. Mark, whose style is very graphic, has fixed attention upon the most aggravated case. It will clear the account of some difficulty if we remember that these narratives were composed, long after the events took place, by writers who, while truthful and painstaking, shared the beliefs of an age which was both unscientific and credulous. All unusual events were looked upon as occurring through supernatural agencies, such as

¹ International Sunday-School Lesson for May 13, 1906.

angels or demons. What we would call a case of lunacy today would be accounted for in Jesus' time as the result of demoniacal possession. Some paroxysm, accompanied by wild gesticulation and outcry, might easily have frightened the herd of swine and produced the result described. The gospels have given the interpretation of their age. It is hardly credible that, as some have supposed, there was in the specific age of Jesus any unusual phenomena of demoniacal possession. We would see Jesus' work as more purely constructive. He restored harmony by bringing into unity the disorganized faculties of a deranged mind. He asks the man's name, that he may help him to collect himself. Then by his own great word of power, he enables the man to regain reason and self-control.

II. SUGGESTED LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. *Power offered.*—The gospels present Jesus as Savior. He saves by restoring man to his normal life. Man is abnormal to the extent that he lacks perfection. Jesus comes to bring man's moral life up to the standard of divine requirement. But man's moral perfection needs mental and physical perfection. Jesus stands as the Savior of the whole man. This is the "good news." We should not be satisfied with a partial gospel. Man is a unit. The hope which saves him should send currents of invigorating power through his very body. The Christian ideal should lift the mind and body to the plane of health and power.

2. *Power restricted.*—The Gerasenes sent Jesus away! He can do no work where he is not welcome. They lost their opportunity. They closed their doors against the great resources which offered themselves. Few people know what wealth is. In every age there is danger that swine will count for more than men. Restoration costs: we want it, but do not want to pay the price. To have the demons cast out might cut down the profits and decrease the revenue. The passion for drink paves our streets and lights our cities. Can we afford to let the restorer visit us and tarry with us?

3. *Power enlarged.*—Jesus recrossed the sea, but he left a witness behind. It was only a healed lunatic, but he had a story to tell. He was faithful to his mission. On a later visit Jesus found Gadara ready to open her doors to him. Any man for whom Christ has done something is equipped for service. Not knowledge, but experience, is the measure of our value as witnesses for him.

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XVIII. THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

MARK 6:14-29²

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Herod Antipas is to be distinguished from his cruel father, Herod the Great (Matt., chap. 2; Luke 1:5), and also from his nephew, Herod Agrippa I (Acts, chap. 12).

The arrest of the Baptist preceded the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry (Matt. 4:12; John 3:24). Matt. 11:2-19 gives one glimpse of the prophet's prison life, which seems to have lasted nearly a year.

Matthew's account (14:1-12) is briefer and adds little. Luke omits the story (but see 9:7-9; 3:18-20).

II. EXPOSITION

Vs. 17: The place of John's confinement was Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, where Herod the Great had built a fortress and palace. Evidently (vs. 27) the feast occurred here. Vs. 18: The guilty relation involved a threefold crime. Herod and Herodias were uncle and niece, and each had a living companion. Vs. 21: The word translated "birthday" more probably means "Accession Feast." "It was not the way of the Herods to keep birthdays, but anniversaries of their accession. These accession days were celebrated with such magnificence as even to excite notice at Rome." (Farrar.) Vs. 22: Strong emphasis is laid upon the rank of the girl; "the daughter of Herodias herself." She was sadly out of place—a princess of the blood offering the entertainment commonly provided by courtesans. Vs. 23: Compare Esther 5:3, 6; 7:2. Vs. 24: The daughter's shame is eclipsed by the mother's relentless purpose to destroy John (cf. Matt. 14:8). Vs. 25: She strikes while the iron is hot. The oath made in the frenzy of inflamed passion may be repudiated when moderation returns. "She came in straightway with haste saying forthwith, Give me the head of John." Vs. 26: The sorrow of Herod recalls Pilate's anxiety to release Jesus (John 19:12).

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: THE ABUSE OF POWER

1. *A preacher of righteousness restrained: power misused.*—The rule perverts his authority to the suppression of the voice crying in the wilderness when that voice condemns his sin. The modern preacher is sometimes bound and silenced by the misused authority of a worldly or corrupt constituency (cf. Jer., chap. 37). The civil authorities misuse their power when they remove from office men who seek to expose and rebuke corruption and crime in public service.

² International Sunday-School Lesson for May 20, 1906

2. A devotee of shame bedecked with authority: power squandered.—The ruin of Herod began in an alliance with a faithless and shameless woman. Familiar association with sinners is the prelude to a division of authority with them. The convenient day always comes, when John is silent in the dungeon and Salome dances before our eyes; when the best impulses are slumbering and our baser nature is all astir with passion. Then it is that evil arrogantly claims its reward and the soul recklessly shares its sovereignty, even to the half of its kingdom. Alliance with evil inevitably leads to this spoliation of our power. A godless wife, a worldly partner, a corrupt political constituency, find their “convenient day,” and in an evil hour we resign in their favor to the half of our kingdom.

3. The reign of terror unchecked: power quiescent.—Herod had heretofore kept John safe; but now his oath palsies his arm. We grant to evil certain liberties, and then hold these as rights too sacred for our interference. We license crime, and then witness the slaughter of the innocents without a word of protest, merely for the oath’s sake. Yet in truth the king’s oath is always limited by the king’s character. The initial and inclusive oath of the kingly office is to defend innocence and uphold righteousness. No man, under any possible combination of circumstances, is obliged to do wrong. Thus is the moral nature disintegrated. We use our power to suppress the voice of conscience and of right. We form an alliance with evil and divide with it our authority. And in the end we sit supinely and behold the slaughter of purity and virtue and hope, which we had not purposed, but which we made possible by the abuse of the power committed to us.

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XIX. FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

MARK 6:30-44³

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The feeding of the multitude, recorded in Mark 6:30-44 and the parallel passages in the other three gospels, is one of the so-called nature miracles. If accepted as a miracle at all, it is difficult to consider it other than as a purely creative act, inexplicable by the supposition of secondary causes; hence not a few scholars, more or less under the sway of naturalism, have endeavored to eliminate the miraculous element from the account.

Accepting as we do, however, the possibility of miracles, the acceptance or rejection of any given miracle is simply a question of evidence. Is

³ International Sunday-School Lesson for May 27, 1906.

the evidence sufficient to substantiate the claim? Fortunately for us, the feeding of the five thousand is the best-attested of all Christ's miracles. It is recorded in all four of the gospels, being the only incident prior to the passion week, with the exception of the beginning of Christ's work in Galilee, that has this fourfold attestation. And if the accounts of Matthew and Luke are derived from Mark, as seems most probable, we yet have the trustworthy testimony of two eyewitnesses—that of Peter, given in Mark, and that of John, in his own gospel.

II. EXPOSITION

Christ had sent forth his twelve disciples, two by two, on a preaching tour through the villages of Galilee. But now, returning from their journey, they gather together, probably at Capernaum, and tell Jesus the results of their work. The Master sees they are tired, and in need of rest; but so great is the crowd coming and going that rest in Capernaum is impossible. He therefore bids the disciples go with him across the Sea of Galilee, that they may be alone in some quiet place, perhaps on the plain of Butaiha. But the desired rest is not to be had; for the multitude, seeing the Master's boat heading for the northeastern end of the sea, hurry afoot around the northern shore; and when Jesus with the disciples comes forth from the boat, he finds five thousand men awaiting him. As he looks upon the restless crowd, without a leader, without a teacher, his heart is stirred with compassion, rest is forgotten, and he begins again to instruct them. The day wears by, and now it is evening. The disciples, realizing that no food is at hand with which to feed so large a number of men, come to Jesus and beg that he send the multitude away, that they may go and supply themselves. "Give ye them to eat," is Jesus' reply. But two hundred pennyworth of bread—the wages of a laborer for six months and more—is necessary that all may be fed, and only five loaves and two fishes are at hand. These the Master takes, and when the multitude is seated in order, like beds of flowers, on the plain now green with the grass of early spring, he looks up to heaven in thanksgiving, breaks the loaves and fishes, and gives to the disciples that they may distribute to the multitude. The five thousand men are satisfied, and fragments remaining are gathered up, enough to fill twelve baskets.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON

Such is the incident. What suggested lessons have we here for the men of today?

1. A lesson, first of all, as to the value of rest. Men worn out with many labors can serve the Master in no better way than by taking a

needed vacation. Jesus bids them come with him to a quiet place and rest awhile, that they may be the better prepared for the duties that lie ahead.

2. A lesson of self-forgetting sympathy. In the presence of multitudes of men, astray like sheep without a shepherd, the Master forgets himself and with compassionate heart seeks to satisfy the needs of others. And as it was two thousand years ago by the Sea of Galilee, so it is in our day. Many men are groping blindly for light, and the spirit of Christ would lead us to forget ourselves in ministering to them.

3. A lesson of practical helpfulness. Not alone in teaching the untaught multitudes does the compassion of Christ express itself, but also in satisfying their lower needs. He would not have his followers forget the physical necessities of men.

4. A lesson of wise economy. Though the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, his treasures are not to be wasted. The resources at our command are not to be abused, but used for worthy ends. Even the fragments are to be gathered up and saved.

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XX. THE GENTILE WOMAN'S FAITH

MARK 7:24-30⁴

I. EXPOSITION

We here reach a crisis in the life of Christ. The spiritual character of his teaching as described in John, chap. 6, made it plain to the people that they could no longer look to him as the long-hoped-for Deliverer and King; hence there was a revulsion of feeling on the part of the multitudes, and a falling away on the part of many of his followers. Then, too, the increasing opposition of the Pharisees and scribes, as indicated in the previous part of this chapter, unmistakably pointed to the inevitable outcome of Jesus' earthly career. He saw that it was time to devote more attention to the special preparation of his disciples for his departure, and the consequent work that would devolve upon them. For this, privacy and retirement were necessary. Hence the withdrawal from Galilee and this journey to the North. Our lesson is an incident of this journey, which is in no sense of a missionary character.

Vs. 24: The Greek word (*ὅρια*) here translated "borders," while meaning primarily the boundaries of a region, is used in the New Testament to designate the region itself included within these boundaries. This fact, and the expression "came through Sidon" in vs. 31, show clearly that,

⁴ International Sunday-School Lesson for June 3, 1906.

at the time of this incident and later, Jesus was entirely outside Jewish territory and on gentile soil. Tyre, "whose antiquity was of ancient days" (Isa. 23:7), and Sidon, her mother (Isa. 23:12), were the chief cities of Phœnicia, which at this time was included in the Roman province of Syria. Vs. 25: That this woman should have known something about Jesus is not strange. Both Mark (3:8) and Luke (6:17) report that the people of Tyre and Sidon were among those who flocked to Galilee to hear and see him (see also Matt. 4:24). Vs. 26: Generally speaking, the woman was a gentile (the Jews used "Greek" in this sense at this time); more particularly she was a "Syrophœnician," which is commonly supposed to be used in distinction to Libophœnician (Carthaginian); but as this contrast has no significance in this narrative, it probably means simply a Syrian living in Phœnicia proper. Vs. 27: Although Jesus' personal attitude and the character of his teaching never savored of the spirit of exclusiveness characteristic of his race, it was necessary for the inauguration and establishment of his work that he confine his personal efforts to his own people (Matt. 15:24). But the word "first" suggests that the gentiles will have their turn. Is the use of the term "dogs" by Jesus an exception to what has just been said? Whenever the dog is mentioned in the Bible (with one possible exception, Prov. 30:31), it is always with contempt. Such was the common use of the term throughout the East. The trend of the story, however, makes it evident that something in Jesus' tone or manner reassured the woman, in spite of the apparent harshness of his words, and emboldened her to urge her request.

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON

A woman's quest. The gospels give us but this one glimpse of the Syrophœnician woman, yet how vivid is the impression she makes upon us!

1. She was *watchful* and *prompt*. So far as we know, Jesus was in this neighborhood but once. The woman was quick to see, and as quick to seize, the opportunity.

2. She had *faith*—a faith so deep and well grounded that nothing could shake her confidence in Christ.

3. She had *persistence*, even *insistence*—a quality that Jesus elsewhere commends in two parables (the Friend at Midnight, Luke 11:5-8, and the Unjust Judge, Luke 18:1-8).

4. She used *her natural powers*—the penetration that saw through the apparent rebuff, the ready wit that shows in her neat answer.

This woman asked and received; she sought and found.

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XXI. PETER'S CONFESSION AND JESUS' PREDICTION AND CONDITION OF DISCIPLESHIP

MATT. 16:13-28⁵

I. EXPOSITION

Jesus did not go into northern Galilee because he feared Herod (Luke 13:31) or the Pharisees, though the latter hindered his work. The reason is found in the discussion after the feeding of the five thousand, which clearly indicated that the people would accept none except a political Messiah. Jesus apprehended that he could not instruct men of such set views, therefore he withdrew into the "parts" (Mark says "villages") of Cæsarea Philippi, probably for retirement and instruction of the disciples (Mark 7:24). The answers (vs. 14) give the summing-up of the opinions held by the people. Jesus, for the first time, discusses his titles. Vs. 16, "the Son of the Living God": equivalent to "the Messiah," and an expansion of Mark's "the Christ." Peter, doubtless, speaks for the disciples. Mark, and John 1:41, 49, and Matt. 14:33, show that this thought was abroad. The significance of this occasion is, that, while previous to this the disciples had the impression that Jesus was the Messiah, now they know it from a personal knowledge of him; and, further, while the people no longer held him to be the Messiah, the disciples still believed it. Vs. 17, "flesh and blood": The divine operation of the Spirit gave Christ's true significance. Jesus alone could satisfy the longing of the heart. Vs. 18: The meaning is not found in the difference of the two words, "Petros" and "petra," but in Peter's conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. It is upon Peter and all men with like faith that Jesus is to build his church. "Hades": the place to which all the living go. Hades prevails over all flesh because mortal, but not over the church which ever stands. Vs. 19, "keys": a figurative expression showing Peter's spiritual insight. "Bind and loose": Peter's judgment of spiritual matters is so correct that his requiring or forbidding anything in this sphere will be viséed in heaven. This responsibility Jesus placed upon all the apostles (Matt. 18:18), not upon Peter alone. Vss. 17-19^a are peculiar to Matthew's gospel, and in this passage the word "church" appears for the first time in the gospels. The other passage where the word is found in the gospels is also peculiar to Matthew (18:17). Vs. 20, "tell no man": With the people's conception of a royal, earthly Messiah, the "telling" would only bring harm. Vs 21 marks such a change in the character of Jesus' teachings that some make it the beginning of the fourth main division of the book. He now begins the preparation of the

⁵ International Sunday-School Lesson for June 10, 1906.

disciples for his death. Though he may have known before this that he must be killed as well as suffer, Jesus now for the first time clearly states it. "Be raised up": as Jesus was conscious that he was the Messiah, so he was sure that he should rise again. Vs. 22, "Peter took him": in a patronizing manner. Vs. 23, "But he turned": Mark implies that the sight of the other disciples necessitated the rebuke. "Stumbling-block": the suggestion of Peter is a temptation to Jesus to escape death. Vs. 24, "deny himself": make God's will and interests of others the aim in life. Vs. 25, "life": used in two senses, natural and spiritual life. "For my sake": for salvation of men; not all losing of life is saving it. Vs. 8, "the kingdom of heaven come with power": gradually coming then in the conversion of people, and identical with the coming of the Son of man.

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: APPREHENDING THE MESSIAH
PRECEDES UNACCEPTABLE INSTRUCTION

1. Accept Jesus as the Son and revealer of the living God, and you are an apt pupil of the teachings of Jesus. Jesus was assured that the disciples held the true conception of his messiahship before he intrusted to them necessary and, for the world, hard instruction. This conception was necessary to save them from carrying out erroneous ideas. The Turk is a butcher because his God is cruel.
2. We are then prepared to accept a suffering Messiah and a suffering God, but, like Peter, we need instruction to realize all that it involves. We need to study the depths of the mystery of Calvary.
3. The lesson at the cross prepares us for the duty of cross-bearing, which means the doing of duty even unto death. The motives, however, are strong.
 - a) We shall find life. The loss is temporal, gain eternal.
 - b) The price we pay for the present life is too large.
 - c) In the judgment at his coming we shall have a reward for faithfulness.

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XXII. THE TRANSFIGURATION

LUKE 9:28-36⁶

I. EXPOSITION

The great confession of Peter (Matt. 16:16) had been acknowledged by Jesus (Matt. 16:17-19). Greatly elated, the disciples looked for the immediate consummation of the messianic kingdom. But instead of promising its near glory, the Master had announced approaching suffering, rejection, and death, all of which was to them simply impossible because

⁶ International Sunday-School Lesson for June 17, 1906.

it seemingly meant defeat. How could messiahship be reconciled with martyrdom, Saviorhood with suffering, deliverance with death? In the days following Jesus would naturally attempt in every possible way to enlighten their darkened minds. The chronicle of those days is not given, but we can scarcely be wrong in supposing that now for the first time he told them of his own inner experience fighting the same difficulty as theirs, when he was driven into the wilderness just after his baptism; that he turned to the law and the prophets, and showed how they linked together the two ideas that to them seemed irreconcilable; that he read for them the signs of the times and showed how the Messiah would inevitably be treated. Added to all this must have been frequent seasons of prayer for their own illumination. It was while they had gone up into Mt. Hermon for one of these times of communion that the transfiguration took place, one week after his first announcement of his approaching humiliation. While the disciples had sunk into a semi-stupor—occasioned no doubt by the exertion of the climb, the bracing night air of the mountain after the heat of the day, the physical reaction from the emotional intensity which the Master's words had produced—Jesus' "face became sun-bright, (his) raiment pure white." Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the law and the prophets, stood with him, bathed in glory, and they talked together about the one thing that had so disturbed the faith of the disciples, his exodus which he was to fulfill in Jerusalem. The sleep-burdened disciples have a vision of this glory, and it startles them into wakefulness, just in time for them to behold Moses and Elijah departing. Peter would detain them, and he appeals to Jesus to allow him and his companions to erect a booth for them and Christ, not really conscious of what he is saying. But even while he is speaking, a bright cloud settles down upon the little company, and from it they hear the divine voice attesting Jesus' messiahship, and summoning them to a full surrender to his teachings concerning the necessity and glory of the cross. The vision passes, and, looking around, the disciples see only Jesus. It is recorded that they told no man in those days any of the things which they had seen (Matthew says that their silence was at the command of Christ, Matt. 7:9). The reason is plain. A relation of it might only arouse the envy of the nine who did not see it; it would not have been understood by them; it might have inspired the over-enthusiastic to unwise measures. Visions are for those only who have been prepared for them.

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: THE MESSAGE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

The important thing about the transfiguration is not the manner of it, concerning which there is a difference of opinion, but the meaning

of it. And whether it was a wholly objective reality, or a wholly subjective experience, or a combination of both, its significance is the same. It seems to present a threefold message:

1. *To Jesus himself.*

- a) His faithfulness thus far was acknowledged.
- b) Reassurance was given of the rightfulness of the course he had chosen.
- c) Both of these were intended to calm and strengthen his spirit for the trials just before him.

2. *To the disciples.*

It was for their sakes primarily, and not for Jesus', that the vision came to convince them of the truth of Jesus' announcement and to hearten them in the face of it. Among other things it taught them:

- a) Messiahship and martyrdom are not out of line with the teachings of the law and prophets; they are linked in the divine plan.
- b) The character of the messianic kingdom is above all things spiritual.
- c) Jesus is indeed the Messiah; they have not been mistaken. This is attested by the conversation of Moses and Elijah, and also, and more significantly, by the divine voice.
- d) Judaism is not overthrown, but glorified in Jesus.
- e) They owe submission to the teachings of but one, and that one is Jesus: "Hear ye him."

3. *To us.*

a) Our prayers may be the means of spiritual illumination both of ourselves and others. It was while Jesus was praying that the transfiguration occurred. Who shall say that the transfiguration was not a direct answer to the prayer of Jesus?

b) Revelation is always according to capacity. Not all the disciples saw the vision; only the three. Every teacher must reserve his deepest thoughts for those who are most ready to receive them.

c) While the nine did not have the vision granted to the three, yet after all they had the essential, "Jesus only." Ecstatic visions are not the necessary accompaniments of the spiritual life. Not the *way* in which we arrive at our faith is the important thing, but rather the *object* of our faith. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

d) Spiritual experiences of an uplifting nature are never given to be a permanent enjoyment. The vision passes, but service remains, and it is because of the needed service that the vision has value.

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